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ABSTRACT

This final report describes the activities and outcomes of a federally funded project that was designed to prepare African-American students at the graduate level as teachers in Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE), who would be capable of meeting the special education needs of young children with disabilities, ages birth through five, and their families. The project was specifically designed to assist in alleviating chronic shortages of teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds teaching children from similar backgrounds, in Florida and particularly in Miami-Dade County. The program was interdisciplinary in nature and included education in typical and atypical child development, working with families, early childhood curricula, assessment and intervention with young children with disabilities, and working with minority children with disabilities in an urban, multicultural setting. The report describes: (1) recruitment strategies used by the program to attract African-American students; (2) advising, financial and administrative support given to the students during their course of study; (3) coursework and internship experiences offered by the program; (4) program evaluation methods and results; and (5) suggestions for improvement. (SG)

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PROJECT BRIDGE
PREPARING AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEACHERS TO WORK WITH YOUNG CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
FINAL REPORT

Project Funding Period – 1996-2000
No-Cost Extension Period – 2000-2001

PR/AWARD # HO29E6008196

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II. Project Summary

Florida's need for appropriately trained, high quality teachers of young children with disabilities has grown each year since early childhood special education (ECSE) services were implemented in the Miami-Dade County Public School (M-DCPS) System in 1978, and throughout the other counties in the state in more recent years. The implementation of the mandates of Public Law 99-457 (EHA) and 101-476 (IDEA) -- that all states and territories must provide free and appropriate public education to all children, ages three through five, with disabilities -- has greatly expanded the need for qualified personnel on the national, state, and local levels. The need is particularly high for African-American teachers of young children with disabilities, since a disproportionate number of children are identified for special education (Knopp & Otuya, 1995).

The overall **goal** of the program was to prepare highly qualified African-American students at the graduate level to meet state endorsement requirements as teachers in ECSE, and who would be capable of meeting the special educational needs of young children with disabilities and their families. This project provided tuition support for graduate students being prepared as ECSE teachers and who would then provide direct services to young children with disabilities and their families in Florida and particularly in Miami-Dade County.

The principal objectives of the program were:

- *To increase the number of African-American ECSE teachers,*
- *To offer an interdisciplinary **preservice** training program in the area of ECSE, and*

- *To prepare African-American teachers with the expertise, knowledge, skills, and experience to serve as community leaders in the area of ECSE.*

The major elements of this interdisciplinary training program included education in typical and atypical child growth and development, working with families, early childhood curricula, assessment and intervention with young children with disabilities, and working with young minority children with disabilities in an urban, multicultural setting. Graduate students had the opportunity to see these elements in practice during their 60 hours of field-based experience (observation and participation) in a variety of multicultural sites serving young children with and without disabilities and their families. Students also completed full-time, six-week internships in schools and centers serving young children with disabilities (birth to five) and their families.

This program was interdisciplinary in nature and was supported by strong collaborative efforts from Florida Memorial College (a traditional black college), the School of Education and the Mailman Center for Child Development of the University of Miami (a minority institution), Miami-Dade County Public Schools (over 88% minority), and several private agencies serving young children with disabilities and their families in the local community.

Project Bridge was specifically designed to attract African-American students into special education, particularly ESCE. This program was the only one in Florida designed specifically to recruit and prepare African-American students to meet the educational needs of young children with disabilities and their families. This program was designed to assist in alleviating chronic shortages of teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds teaching children from similar backgrounds. As

graduates of the program were available to develop and implement programs for young children with disabilities and their families, the shortage of qualified personnel was being reduced and model educational service delivery programs for young children with disabilities were being developed.

III. Project Status

Program Objectives

Objective 1. Recruit qualified graduate students that represent the diversity of South Florida.

Accomplishments:

The University of Miami and Florida Memorial College developed a cooperative and comprehensive recruiting system. Recruitment procedures for the program were followed as outlined in previous continuation reports and were also extended to include members of other culturally and linguistically diverse populations (i.e., Hispanics) who were interested in working with young children with disabilities and their families.

Brochures, newsletters, and flyers announcing the program and available funding were also mailed to members of the University's ECSE Advisory Board agencies providing services to young children with and without disabilities and their families (e.g., Head Start, DIPS, Easter Seals), and all elementary and secondary schools in the county. Announcements were also made in graduate and undergraduate classes and in the Newsletter sent to University of Miami ECSE students. Key University administrators were informed of the program, including procedures for recruiting students, registration, and curriculum development. Key administrators included: Dean, School of Education; Chairperson, Teaching and Learning; Co-Directors of the Mailman Center, and the

Principal of the Debbie School. A faculty member at Florida Memorial College served as a liaison and recruiter for several years at the college. The Project Coordinator also attended the Miami-Dade County New Teacher Orientation and the Quest Conference, hosted by the United Teachers of Dade. As interested applicants inquired about the program, application packets were sent to them.

Outcomes: A highly diverse group of students were recruited for the program. The grant originally stated that a total of 28 students (two cohorts) would be recruited and graduate from the program. **Project Bridge** will graduate a **total of 27 students** (25 part-time; 2 full-time). Fifteen students graduated from the program and 12 students are currently enrolled and are expected to graduate in the fall of 2001 (December). A total of 10 students had to drop from the program due to academic difficulties and personal reasons.

Objective 2: Provide initial and ongoing advising, financial, and administrative support to graduate students during their course of study.

Accomplishments: Advisory support was provided by the Project Co-Directors, the Project Coordinator, and faculty members. Students met with their program faculty advisors to discuss their program of study and complete a course sequence plan. Prior to their first semester of study, students attended an orientation where they were oriented to the University of Miami, the School of Education, and the ECSE program. Moreover, group advising sessions were scheduled and coordinated each semester with students to assist them with the registration process.

Ongoing communication was maintained with the students through the ECSE web site and quarterly newsletters designed to inform them of (a) events in the South Florida

area as well as the rest of the country related to ECSE, (b) changes in legislation and policy related to ECSE, (c) procedures related to graduation and program completion, and (d) upcoming conferences, institutes, seminars, and trainings. Students were also informed by telephone, letters, and flyers posted on campus of events they were expected to attend. Additionally, University of Miami ECSE core faculty and the Florida Memorial liaison hosted social events (i.e., dinner) to encourage students and to provide advising regarding each student's program of study.

Financial management and the maintenance of all financial records are accomplished by the Project Fiscal Manager who works under the direction of the Project Co-Directors along with the Business Manager of the School of Education.

Advisory Board members met twice each year to discuss and review the competencies needed for teaching young students with disabilities as well as to complete questionnaires to identify areas in the program that needed improvement or change. Additionally, weekly meetings were held with the staff and Project Co-Directors to keep all personnel updated on various projects involved in the implementation of this program.

Another resource provided to the students in this program was the ECSE Resource Library. The library was last inventoried on October 2001 and a list of all materials available was updated. The materials available to students include relevant journals, books, screening and assessment instruments, curricula, and videotapes. Selected books from the ECSE Library were placed in the University's main library in order to allow for greater access to the materials by all ECSE students.

Outcomes: Individual advisement led to an approved program for each student. The coursework of each student was evaluated and a course sequence plan was developed.

This assured that all core competencies in the ECSE program were met and that the field-based and internship experiences matched each student's goals and interests. Students in **Project Bridge**, along with faculty and Advisory Board members were kept informed through the web site and the newsletter. Additionally, the maintenance of the students' records in a graduate database allowed for ready access to current student records, which assisted in the monitoring of individual student goals. Monthly accounting reports provided by the Office of Sponsored Programs were the outcome of the budgetary actions.

The ECSE library, containing over 400 books, 100 screening/assessment instruments, and 100 videotapes as well as current brochures, journals, newsletter, audiotapes, and slides was an invaluable resource for supporting students in their coursework.

Objective 3: Provide a high quality, interdisciplinary Master's degree program in ECSE that would prepare teachers to effectively meet the individual needs of young children with disabilities and their families from a multicultural community.

Accomplishments: The program was designed to ensure that students meet Florida's endorsement requirement for ECSE and state eligibility for special education (i.e., Varying Exceptionalities (VE) K-12. A course sequence plan was developed for each student. In addition, students were involved in field-based and internship experiences working with young children with disabilities (ages birth to five) and their families in a variety of private and public settings in the local community.

Students attended and participated in professional development seminars in the areas of APA Style writing, ERIC Database searches, Grandparents as Caregivers, High/Scope curriculum, Sign Language, Autism, Early Intervention and the Natural Environment Mandate, Electronic Portfolios, Feeding and Positioning, Assistive Technology – PRIME Time Van, a specially designed Writing Seminar to enhance the existing coursework, and a visit to the Dolphin Research Center in Key Largo, FL.

A meeting with the Project Co-Directors, the ECSE core faculty, and the Teaching and Learning Department Chair was held to discuss course outlines and to assure that all core competencies were being met in courses. Additionally, the meeting was used as an opportunity to assure that appropriate field-based and internship experiences were embedded into each course.

A meeting was also arranged with the ECSE core faculty from the University of Miami, the Project Co-Directors, the Project Coordinator, and Florida Memorial faculty (including the Dean of the School of Education, the Department Chair, and the UM-FM liaison) to discuss student progress and to develop procedures for improving collaborative efforts and expand recruitment procedures.

Outcomes: All students in the **Project Bridge** program were enrolled in courses that follow a specified program of study to ensure students received coursework, and field-based and internship experiences.

As a result of the UM-FM meeting to discuss student progress and to improve collaborative efforts, a tutoring program was implemented where doctoral and masters level students in the last semester of their program led study groups for classes **Project Bridge** students were enrolled in.

Objective 4: Maintain student records and financial accounts.

Accomplishments: Financial accounts were reviewed weekly and reports were generated for the Project Co-Directors. Orders for materials as well as student accounts were managed by the Project Fiscal Manager.

Outcomes: The Project Fiscal Manager was responsible for expenditure control for staff and students (i.e., reimbursements) as well as processing payroll for all personnel. She also processed tuition support statements for each student every semester. Necessary budget revisions were made as per US Department of Education's request.

Objective 5: Evaluate the program and make necessary revisions.

Accomplishments: Faculty advisors and Project Co-Directors were engaged in ongoing monitoring of the program in order to stay apprised of program quality and student satisfaction. Students participated in either focus group or telephone interviews in addition to completing a student feedback form during the fall group advising session, a survey during the spring group advising session, and written evaluations of their internship experience at the end of the summer session. Other stakeholder groups were asked to participate in evaluation activities and these included Advisory Board members, and principals employing students. The purpose of the evaluations was to assure that the students were successfully meeting the program's core competencies. Additionally, informal meetings or e-mail exchanges with students and the Project Coordinator were ongoing in order to gain feedback on areas of strength and those needing improvement in the program. The following information was collected during the 2000-2001 academic year.

Surveys and Open-Ended Questionnaires - Spring, 2000 and Spring, 2001

Of the students enrolled in **Project Bridge**, thirteen (n=13) completed a survey and nine (n=9) responded to a written open-ended questionnaire during the Spring 2000, and twenty-eight (n=28) students completed the survey during the Spring 2001. Survey data focused on sample characteristics and evaluating aspects of the program including program coursework, faculty, staff and advisors, and the internship experience.

Demographic information (Spring, 2000). Of the thirteen students who completed the survey, twelve are female. Students had a variety of areas of certification, including Elementary Education (38%), Exceptional Student Education (ESE) and Other (Math Education, Educational Leadership, ESOL) (23%), Pre-K Primary (15%), and Early Childhood Education and Primary (8%). Nine students are currently teaching in a public school setting, one student in a faith-based school, and two are full-time students in the program. Of those working, seven are General Education (GE) teachers, four are ESE teachers, and one is an ECSE teacher. Some of the GE teachers (50%) had special education students mainstreamed in their classrooms. The average total number of years of teaching for the sample is 5.9 years. No student had completed his or her internship experience at the time of completion of the survey.

Demographic information (Spring, 2001). Of the twenty-eight students who completed the survey, twenty-seven are female. Students had a variety of areas of certification, including ESE (42%), Other (ESOL, Art, Math, Psychology, and Spanish) (31%), Elementary Education (23%), Early Childhood Education (12%), and Pre-K Primary, Primary, and Pre-K Endorsement (8%). Seventeen students are currently teaching in a public school setting, five students in a private setting, and five in other

settings (faith-based schools). One student did not respond. Of those working, fourteen are ESE teachers, seven are GE teachers, three are ECSE teachers, and the rest hold other positions (i.e., substitute teacher). The average total number of years teaching for the sample is 5.0 years. Four students had completed his or her internship experience at the time of completion of the survey.

Program/Coursework (Spring, 2000). All students who completed the survey agreed that the program had assisted them in mastering the needed skills and knowledge in the field of ECSE and 92% would recommend the program to a friend. The majority of students reported that they were highly satisfied with the overall content and quality of the ECSE courses and that the ECSE courses integrated both practical and theoretical principles (92%). Students shared the following comments, "*I feel that the program provides a good depth of background knowledge and hands on training*" and "*The coursework quality is great. I also like the fact that we have a choice between completing a portfolio and taking the comprehensive exam.*"

The vast majority of students (93%) either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that the ECSE program had prepared them to work with young children with disabilities and their families. All students reported feeling prepared to participate in the assessment process while 92% reported being prepared to organize and implement a program or select and adapt curriculum for young children with disabilities. In addition, all students indicated that they had taken advantage of the support services offered through the program. However, only 77% of students indicated that their individual needs had been addressed appropriately in the program. Students shared the following comments, "*Offer more of the same classes at different times and on different days of the week*" and "*Be*

more understanding of the professional's other imperative obligations and responsibilities."

Program/Coursework (Spring, 2001). All students who completed the survey agreed that the program had assisted them in mastering the needed skills and knowledge in the field of ECSE and 96% would recommend the program to a friend. The majority of students reported that they were highly satisfied with the overall content and quality of the ECSE courses, that the ECSE courses integrated both practical and theoretical principles, and were useful in preparing them for working with young children with disabilities and their families (96%).

The vast majority of students (93%) either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that the ECSE program had prepared them to organize and implement a program for young children with disabilities. Ninety-three percentage of students reported feeling prepared to select and adapt curriculum for young children with disabilities while 86% felt prepared to participate in the assessment process. In addition, 96% of students indicated that their individual needs as students had been addressed appropriately in the program. However, only 68% of students indicated that they had taken advantage of the support services offered through the program such as workshops and seminars to enhance their professional development. Students shared the following comments, "*I am still completing the program, but I am satisfied with the program. I only wish weekend classes were available*" and *"I would like more practical classes, a method class perhaps."*

Faculty/Staff/Advisors (Spring, 2000). Students who completed the survey were satisfied with the personnel involved in the program and their accessibility to them. A student shared the following comment, "*I am having a wonderful experience. The ECSE*

team has been wonderful." All students either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that the project coordinator was accessible and available, and that the program faculty advisors and the project coordinator assisted them in answering questions about the program and their program of study. Ninety-two percent of the students indicated that they felt the ECSE faculty and program faculty advisors were accessible.

All students reported being satisfied with the overall quality of instruction provided by the ECSE faculty. The following representative quotes were written by students on the open-ended questionnaire, "*A strength is some of the teachers are excellent*"; "*The professors are very knowledgeable of the subject matter*"; and "*The coursework is very effective.*"

Faculty/Staff/Advisors (Spring, 2001). The majority of students who completed the survey felt the faculty was accessible to them (96%) and 89% was satisfied with the quality of instruction provided by the ECSE faculty. One student shared, "*I am extremely impressed with the faculty and administrators at the School of Education."* Moreover, 89% of students believed the program faculty advisors and the project coordinator helped them understand and develop their program of study, and were accessible to answer questions (86%). A student in the program said, "*I feel that the program advisor/project coordinator listens to the requests from the students and schedules seminars that are helpful and interesting.*"

Internship experience (Spring, 2000). At the time of completion of the survey, no student in the program had started his or her internship experience.

Internship experience (Spring, 2001). At the time of completion of the survey, only four students in the program had started his or her internship experience. All

students reported being satisfied with their internship placement site and believed that their internship experience was useful in preparing them to work with young children with disabilities and their families. In addition, students reported that their clinical supervisor (on-site teacher) assisted them throughout the experience.

Focus Group – Summer, 2000

During the focus group discussion, students were asked to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses in the ECSE master's program. The following areas were reported as major strengths of the program: (a) a small, student-centered program; (b) the quality and accessibility of full-time University of Miami professors and program staff members; (c) the variety of activities organized and implemented by the program; (d) the ease and simplicity of the registration process; and (e) the emphasis on technology in courses.

Many students agreed that what they liked about the program was the personalized treatment and services they receive as students. *"Everybody knows you in the program. I think it is important to me for people to know my name and know about me."* They also commented that another advantage of being part of a small program is the ability to form cohorts for study groups.

The majority of students agreed that most professors in the program were of high quality and highly accessible. Students identified two ECSE core faculty members as the "*strength and the core of the program.*" However, they added that some of the "*good professors aren't staying in the class. This is the same thing that happens in the county. Good teachers are rewarded by being taken out of the classroom.*" The majority of professors made themselves accessible via e-mail and through their willingness to meet

with students between class breaks or after class. Many students added that they appreciated those professors who were flexible and understanding of their situation as working teachers and "*went that extra mile*". Students shared, "*Having my assignments previewed before turning them in was nice*" and "*[Professor] waited for me in her office when I was running late so that I could turn in my final exam.*" The Project Coordinators were noted to be highly flexible and accessible to students on a consistent basis via telephone and e-mail exchanges. "*They return calls and try to solve problems.*" The noted exceptions in reference to accessibility as identified by many students were a visiting assistant professor and an adjunct faculty member. [Professor] was "*always in a hurry...and it was never a good time*" and "*...responded to my e-mail almost after the semester was over.*"

The activities developed and organized for the program were viewed by students as being both helpful and beneficial for furthering their professional development. These activities included the Prime Time Van, parent speakers, and informational seminars (i.e., Autism). Furthermore, the emphasis placed in some courses on the use of technology through on-going online discussions and courses listed online was also reported to be "*helpful*" to students. "*Everyone contributed his or her area of expertise in the discussions.*"

One of the major areas of weakness identified by the majority of students in the program was the amount of work assigned in each course. A consistent comment among all students was that there is "*too much...unrealistic*" work and outside projects to complete in each course. Many students perceived these assignments and projects as "*busy work*" and irrelevant. Moreover, the portfolio requirement was perceived as being

part of the "*extra work*". Students shared that program expectations for the portfolio were not made clear to them. "*We were told not to worry about the portfolio...but it is now a lot of extra work.*"

Another area of weakness identified by students was the lack of flexibility that exists in course offerings and final exam scheduling. Although many students shared that they were initially told that this was a program specifically designed for working teachers, they feel it is "*very rigid.*" Some students stated that they were forced to take classes during certain semesters or their funding would be jeopardized.

A third weakness noted was the lack of knowledge students had in completing the required paperwork for the university (i.e., graduation, mastery candidacy), county (i.e., job application), and state (i.e., teacher certification, endorsements). Students commented that they did not know all the paperwork or the process involved in completing them. They perceived this process as unclear to them. Students commented, "*I had no idea you had to apply for graduation*" and "*We need to be informed about what is coming next in the job and certification process.*"

Students were asked about the usefulness of their ECSE courses in their program of study. The majority of students stated that the courses that had been the most useful to them were those that were practical, hands-on, and geared toward a younger population of children. Courses identified as most useful included (a) Adaptive Technology and Computers in Early Childhood (TAL 682), (b) Working with Families of Young Children with Disabilities: Strategies and Medical Issues (TAL 680), (c) Evaluation and Assessment in Infant and ECSE (TAL 615), (d) Intervention Strategies in Infant and ECSE (TAL 616) and (e) the Physical Therapy portion of the Typical and Atypical Child

Development (TAL 614). According to many students, "*these courses provided us with specific information...very hands-on and lots of information.*"

Courses that were identified by students in the program as least useful were those that were impractical for young children with disabilities and/or taught by what the students' perceived as an unqualified professor. These courses included (a) Prescriptive Teaching of Learning and Behavior Disordered Students (TAL 634), (b) Classroom and Behavior Management (TAL 632) and (c) Typical and Atypical Child Development (TAL 614). In general, students summarized their course experience with the following quote, "*Many assignments were like busy work and a waste of time. Professors made courses least useful. The courses were good, but the professors were horrible.*"

As part of the focus group discussion, students were asked if they felt prepared to work with young children with disabilities. All students commented that their preparedness centered on working with families with children with disabilities. They reported that they felt more aware of the topics and issues that needed to be appropriately explained to parents and they have gained knowledge in viewing all families as different with differing viewpoints. Students shared, "*I am more sensitive to what I say to parents*" and "*I have learned to also focus on life outside of school because it reflects on how my students act in school.*"

Support services identified by students as being the most beneficial included (a) Orientation scheduled at the beginning of their program, (b) ECSE Resource Library, (c) Topple Career Center, (d) Writing Center, and (e) school system speakers.

Many students agreed that they would recommend the program to others, but would also inform them of the expectations and requirements of the program. "*They need*

to be prepared to give up a lot and get an organizer." Two students shared that they would not recommend the program to others due to the "*overwhelming amount of busy work*" assigned and the time commitment. "*It is very hard for families...working people...at the end it is very tough.*"

Internship Experience Evaluation – Summer, 2001

Four-Week Internship Experience

Students in the program completed a survey (n=22) with Likert-type items and open-ended questions. Survey questions focused on students' perceptions of their **four-week internship** experience in a Prekindergarten (Pre-K) Exceptional Student Education (ESE) classroom working with young children with disabilities and their families, ages 3-5, or a specialized placement (i.e., Shake-a-Leg). Specifically, students were asked about their perceptions of the internship setting, university supervisor, and clinical supervisor.

Perceptions of internship settings. All students either strongly agreed or agreed that they felt prepared to enter their internship experience, and the majority (91%) also believed their internship setting was useful in meeting their career goals, provided them with experiences that were educationally challenging and stimulating, and that the school and personnel understood the nature and purpose of their role as a student-intern. Eighty-six percent responded that their internship experience provided opportunities for them to learn how to teach young children with disabilities. Many students recommended their setting for placing future student interns, and perceived the internship experience as positive and rewarding. Students shared the following quotes: "*I would recommend this internship experience to another student because of the support and guidance that I received from this internship setting*"; "*I think all aspects of my internship were positive*

and rewarding. The setting was challenging, interesting, and with a great deal of new information"; and "*I had an outstanding experience this summer. I was given the opportunity to utilize all the knowledge and strategies that I have learned in the ECSE program."*

Additionally, one student shared her thought about the importance of having students complete an internship experience, even those with teaching experience, "*I was thrilled with my internship placement. At first I did not think this internship was necessary because I was already a teacher. However, I was completely wrong. I was exposed to so much information when it comes to Pre-K ESE. I was very thankful for this opportunity and believe everyone should have such an enjoyable experience."*

Perceptions of university supervisors. All students either strongly agreed or agreed that their university supervisor was available to them for direct supervision and consultation, understood their professional and personal needs for learning and experiencing, and provided them with meaningful, timely, and constructive feedback. Ninety-five percent responded that their university supervisors were able to give them sufficient independence to accomplish goals and 86% believed their university supervisor modeled the technical skills and professional competence necessary to teach young children. Many students commented about the willingness of university supervisors to help and assist them during their internship experience and their high level of understanding and feedback. One student shared, *"[UM Supervisor] was extremely supportive and helpful. She offered great advice and constructive criticism. I enjoyed having her come into class and learned a great deal from the anecdotes she shared about*

her classroom experience." Another student commented, "*I feel she was capable and understanding of what interns need in regards to information and support*."

Perceptions of clinical supervisors. The majority of students either strongly agreed or agreed that (a) clinical supervisors were available to them for direct supervision and consultation (95%), (b) were able to provide sufficient independence to accomplish goals (95%), (c) understood their professional and personnel needs for learning and (e) experiencing (91%), (d) provided them with meaningful, timely, and constructive feedback (91%), and modeled the technical skills and professional competence necessary to teach young children (91%). Many students commented that their clinical supervisor provided them with ample opportunities to implement their ideas and encouraged them to be independent in the classroom. One student said, "*She answered every one of my questions and provided me with constructive feedback. She shared all of her experiences and materials with me. She showed me the Pre-K handbook and the High/Scope handbook. She gave me all of the freedom and guidance I needed, allowed me to write key note experiences, and lesson plans. It was a wonderful experience!*" Moreover, many students noted that they would recommend their clinical supervisor to other student interns. One student shared, "*I would recommend this clinical supervisor to future interns. She exhibits appropriate adult/child interaction and [is] competent in leadership skills*."

A few students identified areas of weaknesses within their internship experience and these included (a) the short number of weeks in the internship experience making it not the "*reality*"; (b) the lack of structure and organization at one particular specialized setting; and (c) clearer guidelines as to the specific obligations and requirements needed

to complete the internship experience as outlined in the internship handbook and portfolio guides. One student commented, "*What I would also recommend is that...specific obligations are written for both to see. My specialized placement handbook was outdated and did not specify what requirements are necessary to meet the portfolio requirements. When [UM Supervisor] gave me information it was not acceptable to ECSE [Committee]. These things need to be clearly specified.*"

Two-Week Rotation Experience

Students in the program completed a survey (n=22) with Likert-type items and open-ended questions. Survey questions focused on students' perceptions of their **two-week rotation** experience in a variety of private and public local agencies, schools, or organizations providing services to young children with disabilities (predominately 0-2) and their families. Specifically, students were asked about their perceptions of the rotation settings and their recommendations for retaining these rotation settings for the future as well as other settings that would be beneficial and insightful to future student interns.

Perceptions of the rotation settings. Ninety-five percent of students either strongly agreed or agreed that the two-week rotation provided opportunities to learn about local resources available to them as teachers who are working with young children with disabilities and their families. The majority of students felt that one of the major strengths of this rotation experience was that they were exposed to a large variety of agencies, schools, or organizations that provided services to young children with disabilities and their families. Students shared, "*We saw several centers that provide various services for children. I didn't know many of these places existed and now I know which kids to refer*

to which services. I learned about evaluating children and made several contacts, especially at FDLRS" and "*The strengths are that we got the opportunity to visit and get tours of special facilities – to then be able to refer parents to.*" Additionally, 91% of the students felt prepared to enter their two-week rotation experience.

However, only 50% of students responded that the two-week rotation provided experiences that were educationally challenging and stimulating. Moreover, 41% of students either strongly disagreed or disagreed that the agencies, schools, or organizations understood the nature and purpose of their role and responsibilities as students in the rotation experience. Many students commented that the scheduling of visits to these agencies, schools, or organizations was an area that needed to be revisited and improved by the ECSE program. This student shared the following comment, "*The University must also work out better scheduling to avoid 'down times' such as having a full day of no interactions [with students] due to a teacher workday.*" Another student said, "*The summer is not really 'regular' and the day was long. I got much from the morning routines; however in the afternoon the children nap – especially because its early childhood and time was wasted. I realize that this is a good time for the teachers to talk to us. But some did not wish to.*" Students recommended scheduling two or more agencies, schools, or organizations on the same day.

Many students were also concerned about the degree to which these agencies, schools, or organizations understood their roles and responsibilities as university students during the two-week rotation. The majority of students felt that the contact person on site lacked clarity about who the students were, what their purpose was at the site, and what they were expected to complete as part of the rotation. One student said, "*There was no*

clarity of the roles of the [university] students at the facility. I felt that at a couple of sites we were in the way and disrupted the director's schedule for hours." Another student commented, "*Many of the site supervisors didn't know what we were supposed to do.*" Students recommended limiting the number of sites to visit during the entire two-week rotation as to decrease the amount of scheduling demands and burdens on the site contact person and having more than one contact person at each site to take the lead in orientating the university students during the rotation.

Recommended sites for rotations. The majority of students recommended the following sites for future consideration for the two-week rotation: (a) neonatal intensive care unit, (b) juvenile detention center, (c) United Cerebral Palsy, (d) Linda Ray, (e) Lighthouse for the Blind, and (f) MacLamore.

Advisory Board Evaluation Feedback-Spring, 2000 and Spring, 2001

Spring, 2000. ECSE Advisory Board members were asked to complete a questionnaire providing feedback for program improvement. A total of six (n=6) questionnaires were completed providing the following information and recommendations:

- The student qualities valued by the members of the board in hiring students from the program include their high level of professionalism, specialized training and knowledge in early childhood, willingness to learn, kindness, and helpfulness.
- Provide students with more opportunities to enroll in a research course.
- Provide students with more "*real-work*" training in the field. One member commented, "*There is much theory, but less practice and practical experiences. I suspect with the portfolios you are trying to address this.*"

- Students need more training in the area of classroom management.

Spring, 2001. A total of eight (n=8) surveys were completed by advisory board members. Members range from being directors of programs providing direct services to children with disabilities and their families, to professors in teacher education programs. Seventy-five percent of the members felt that graduates of the program are prepared to be effective ECSE teachers and have the necessary skills (i.e., teaching and working with families). Furthermore, 87.5% of the members agreed that advisory board meetings are an important and worthwhile component of the program and provide the program with advice about future directions to take.

Identified strengths of the program included (a) key personnel in the program, (b) the internship experience, and (c) student support in the form of tuition assistance. Members shared the following comments, *"The co-directors of the ECSE program...are significant strengths. The attention to meeting students' needs and assuring that they are knowledgeable and well-prepared professionals"* and *"The internship experience offers opportunity to implement knowledge acquired. Clinical teachers are supportive and knowledgeable."*

Suggestions for improvement included (a) an internship orientation meeting with the University of Miami supervisors to review guidelines and requirements, (b) longer internships, (c) hands-on workshops on feeding, positioning, and handling medically fragile children, (d) administering assessment instruments, and (e) constructing classroom materials. For example, one advisory board member commented, *"Each student must give a battery of assessments to a child or a few children – include LAP-D, Early LAP, RLDC or OLPS (for LEP children). Also, use PQA from High/Scope and assess a learning*

environment. Develop a behavior management plan for a specific (real) child in a class and try to implement with teacher. Make some song boards, nursery rhyme boards, story boards, to be used during first month of school."

Principal Survey for UM School of Education Graduates – May 2001

A total of eight (n=8) principals completed a survey on recent graduates of the program rating the graduates' performance in a variety of areas. Of the sample, six principals are from the elementary level and two from the middle school level. All principals believed the program graduates had the necessary knowledge of the subject matter they taught, the ability to present subject matter clearly to students in their classroom, the ability to integrate curriculum to enhance their students' learning, plan effectively for instruction, adjust their instruction based on assessment information, and communicate orally and in writing with others. One principal commented on a program graduate, *"Only strengths! She has the ability to work with everyone and the results are outstanding."*

Approximately 87% of the principals that completed the survey responded that the program graduates adhered to high ethical standards and professional behavior, engaged in self-improvement and professional development activities throughout the year, and overall, rated their performance as excellent. Moreover, 75% would hire other graduates from the School of Education to work at their school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Some recommendations from students for program improvement are outlined below.

5. The scheduling of certain classes needs to be revisited and modified. For example, TAL 615 and TAL 616 should be courses offered in the fall and spring and not during summer sessions or at the end of a student's program of study.

OUTCOME

Starting Fall 2000, TAL 615 will be offered in the Fall semesters and TAL 616 will be offered in the Spring.

6. A more coordinated integration of course projects and assignments with portfolio tasks. A student shared, "*There needs to be better coordination...right now there seems to be a lack of communication.*"

OUTCOME

The portfolio guidelines are reviewed yearly by ECSE staff, faculty, and Advisory Board members to ensure activities match the objectives of the program.

7. A variety of elective courses in early childhood should be offered to students in field specialties like Autism and Mental Retardation.

OUTCOME

Currently there are no programs in the School of Education, which focus on Autism and Mental Retardation. Due to state requirements for certification and endorsement the

program has very limited space to include electives without increasing the number of credits.

4. The observation and evaluation of full-time and adjunct professors to ensure an appropriate level of professionalism in student-professor interactions and in qualifications to deliver appropriate and relevant instruction in early childhood.

OUTCOME

The report has been shared with the Dean of the School of Education and the Chair of the Teaching and Learning department. They have implemented procedures to ensure the quality of faculty including a yearly evaluation.

5. A seminar on completion of the portfolio should be developed and offer to all students in the program.

OUTCOME

Each semester the Project Coordinator holds a portfolio seminar. Students are encouraged to attend this seminar and to bring their portfolios for review. In addition, students are notified each semester about the importance of meeting with their program faculty advisor to review their portfolios. Students also have access to a portfolio companion manual and guidelines on the ECSE webpage.

6. Students were concerned about the scheduling of visits and their role and responsibilities as student interns during the two-week rotation experience.

OUTCOME

The Co-Directors of the ECSE program and the Project Coordinator will plan, develop, and schedule an orientation with all site contact individuals prior to the arrival of student interns at the selected sites for the two-week rotation experience. During the orientation, individuals will be briefed about the goal and objectives of the experience, the roles and responsibilities of the student interns, the role of the site and the site's contact person(s), the role of the University Supervisor, and the schedule at each site.

7. Clearer guidelines are needed in both the internship handbook and the portfolio guides to inform the students in the ECSE program of their responsibilities in regards to required assignments during the internship experience and the role of each member of the internship team.

OUTCOME

The ECSE program has an internship handbook that outlines the goals and objectives of the internship, the composition of the internship team, the roles and responsibilities, and appropriate supporting documentation required. The internship handbook is currently under revision in order to make certain sections of the handbook clearer to the students in the program. Furthermore, portfolio guides are also currently being revised by the ECSE Area Committee. Revised drafts of the handbook and the guides will be forwarded to members of the Advisory Board and our consultant for their recommendation and feedback.

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